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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 2173  
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COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD  
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Mideast

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Key stories in the media:  
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All major media today focused on Arab and international media reports of an impending deal between Israel and Hamas on the release of Gilad Shalit in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. In its early morning news program, Israel Radio reported on the issue of Gilad Shalit that senior Hamas figures from Gaza and from outside the

territories are scheduled to arrive in Cairo in order to decide on the deal for his release. Israel Radio quoted Al-Arabiya in its report last night that substantial progress had been made on the deal. According to the report, the German mediator gave Hamas a new list of prisoners that Israel was willing to release in exchange for Shalit.

Sources in Hamas said that the deal would be carried out within a few days, if an agreement were to be reached on the matter of Israeli Arab and East Jerusalem resident prisoners. However, a Hamas source assessed that the deal would not be completed this week. Gilad Shalit's father, Noam, said last night that he had no new information regarding his son, since receiving the latest update last week. Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer said that he felt that unlike in the past, the Gilad Shalit affair was very close to a conclusion. Yediot Ahronot led with two front-page articles, by Alex Fishman and Sima Kadmon, about the implications of any such deal, while Ma'ariv reported that Noam and Aviva Shalit are scheduled to meet with the prime minister's special envoy, Hagai Hadas, in Tel Aviv today, after which they intend to go to the Knesset to persuade the powers that be to make the necessary concessions to release their son from Hamas captivity.

Israel Hayom quotes President Shimon Peres as saying yesterday during a joint press availability with President Mubarak, in response to a question on settlement freeze, that Israel is not expanding settlements, not confiscating land, and not investing in infrastructure. He also said that the Government of Israel has already announced that it will not build new settlements once negotiations begin and that it will evacuate illegal outposts. On the same issue, Alex Fishman in Yediot Ahronot reported that Israel has begun preparing for the possibility of renewed negotiations, which would include a freeze of settlement constructions. The Ministry of Defense has already completed military orders instructing a full freeze of construction in Judea and Samaria, to be delivered upon negotiations' renewal. Israel Radio reported that Israeli minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer arrived last night in Turkey and is scheduled to hold a series of economic and political meetings today in Istanbul and Ankara. Upon his arrival in Turkey, Ben-Eliezer said that the relationship between Ankara and Jerusalem was under a cloud, but that it would be best to look ahead.

On threats from Iran, Israel Radio reported that a high-ranking Iranian officer reacted dismissively to the possibility that Israel would attack nuclear facilities in his country. He said that even if Israel's fighter planes should succeed in evading Iran's air defense system, their bases would be destroyed by surface-to-surface missiles before they would have a chance to land. Iranian Defense Minister Vahidi said that Iran intended to develop its own anti-aircraft missile system in response to the delay in the supply of S-300 missiles promised by Russia. The Iranian army and the Revolutionary Guard launched a large-scale exercise yesterday, practicing the defense of nuclear facilities against an air strike.

Block Quotes:

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Mideast:

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1I. "Shalit deal may be near, but nobody's talking"

Military correspondent Amos Harel and Palestinian affairs correspondent Avi Issacharoff wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (11/23): "There are telling signs out there [of an impending deal for Gilad Shalit]... Another positive development is Saturday's announcement ... that rocket fire would end. It is doubtful that the timing of the announcement is coincidental... Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is backing [the deal], support from Defense Minister Ehud Barak is guaranteed ... Shas will follow its spiritual leader Ovadia Yosef ... Mossad chief Dagan and Shin Bet Diskin probably will oppose the move, but Chief of Staff Ashkenazi will back it. What is unusual is the role of military censorship: Compared to previous times, there is a near absolute blackout. The Censor says that preventing detailed reporting is not directed at public opinion and is merely to allow the negotiations

to continue unhindered."

## II. "Bibi Afraid Cabinet Won't Approve Deal"

Senior diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (11/23): "Yesterday President Shimon Peres [said] "real progress has been made in the talks to release Shalit." ... It is safe to assume that Prime Minister Netanyahu is about to make one of the most dramatic decisions in his term ... when does a country capitulate to terrorism? From Netanyahu's perspective, [it is] a complete reversal on everything that he has ever preached in his books, speeches [and] political doctrine ... The question that Netanyahu and Defense Minister Barak have been deliberating over is who will approve the deal. People who witnessed Netanyahu's deliberation have spoken about a ministerial committee that will be comprised of members who will support the deal. Another possibility is to formulate a motion that will be put to a cabinet vote empowering Netanyahu to make the decision on his own. The above stems from Netanyahu's concern that he will be unable to muster a majority within his own cabinet to support the prisoner exchange deal. ... One thing is certain: international pressure on Netanyahu will mount to lift the siege on the Gaza Strip. No one will take seriously Netanyahu's arguments that no talks must be held with Hamas. The truth needs to be said, even if that truth is hard to swallow: releasing hundreds of Palestinian murderers will further entrench the Hamas regime in the Gaza Strip and will ultimately force the Netanyahu government to live with the consequences. It will be ironic to see that government take Shaul Mofaz to task for saying that talks could be held with Hamas "under certain conditions."

## III. "What price Shalit?"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (11/23): "Arab press reports, echoed in Israel, claim that Gilad Shalit's long ordeal in Hamas captivity may be nearing its end... When it comes to Shalit, it's hard to know where the spin ends and the news begins... Plainly, Netanyahu is loath to have his government approve a lop-sided prisoner exchange that requires setting free some of the most dangerous terrorists Israel has ever encountered. Yet he may be telling himself that any such deal would be the absolutely, positively, honest-to-goodness, very last time Israel capitulates to Hamas or Hizbullah....An ill-considered prisoner deal could also bring down Mahmoud Abbas's already tottering Palestinian Authority in the West Bank....Too Bad Israelis can't look to Egypt to play a constructive role... Cairo is ready to disregard the [Quartet] principles for Hamas participation in a Palestinian unity government ... turning a blind eye to Palestinian arms smuggling.... Mubarak is also doing everything possible to harden Abbas's heart, telling the Egyptian parliament Israel alone was to blame for the paralysis in the peace talks, called on Israel to stop "Judaizing" Jerusalem and demanded it reconcile itself to the Arabs' refusal to recognize its right to exist as a Jewish state ... As Much as we Israelis ache to see Gilad Shalit home ... the emotional blackmail of campaigners who say the country should do "anything" to achieve his release could unleash on our home front the very same sociopathic killers Israel's security forces worked so hard to capture in the first place. We urge the premier to leave no stone unturned in trying to bring Gilad home, while placing the national interest above all."

## IV. "Prisoners With Blood Up to Their Ears"

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (11/23): "We are not talking about a deal in which prisoners with blood on their hands are going to be released in exchange for...Gilad Shalit. We are talking about prisoners who are drenched in blood up to their ears....We are talking about the release of a few dozen major terrorists who were sentenced to consecutive life terms for the most heinous terror attacks ever committed. The dilemma currently facing Prime Minister Netanyahu: is the State of Israel prepared to release murderers? People whose release will plant hope...and a message: you can murder Jews. In the end, someone is going to release you.... The second dilemma is: Is this the price that Israel needs to pay in light of the ineptitude of its security apparatus? The third dilemma is unique to the Netanyahu era. If masses of Palestinian prisoners are released Abu Mazen might as well resign. This deal will be an Israeli death sentence to the Abu Mazen government.... To compensate

Abu Mazen...the Israeli government is going to have to think about releasing...Fatah prisoners on his behalf, expanding the territory under the PA's rule extensively, a dramatic cessation of construction in the settlements. And we haven't even begun to talk about how Israel will be perceived in the world and in the Arab world, about the blow to our own morale and another long list of dilemmas that Netanyahu and his cabinet ministers still have to face."

IV. "Because There is No Choice"

Political and parties columnist Sima Kadmon wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (11/23): "Aviva and Noam Shalit... will begin a battle, perhaps their last, to win over the hearts of the cabinet ministers. In the past number of days... all of us have been vacillating between skepticism and hope. But this time the sense is that things are different...the moment of truth has arrived. But what appears to be self-evident...is probably far from being such. Netanyahu is hardly at peace with himself. His concern is that the deal...will not be approved. The political sources said that Netanyahu is looking for a forum that will ensure him a majority. What is clear at present is that Netanyahu is about to make far-reaching concessions. What we already know is what the opponents are going to say: capitulation to terrorism; terms were dictated entirely by Hamas; Israel will have to lift the siege on Gaza; how the deal is going to weaken moderate Palestinians and strengthen extremists. Those are not arguments that can be dismissed. Netanyahu is going to need all the help he can get. It isn't going to be easy...but as soon as the prime minister throws his full weight behind the matter, he will be able to muster a majority. What will this do to Netanyahu? From being a prime minister who dodges making decisions, he will turn into a prime minister who made a major and difficult decision, but one that was correct and unavoidable. Bring him back home already."

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